SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Best of Kyoto and Beyond



Tour Overview

Experience more of Kyoto on the Best of Kyoto and Beyond tour. Steeped in history and tradition, Kyoto has in many ways been the cradle of Japanese culture. A stroll through Kyoto today is a walk through 11 centuries of Japanese history.

📍 Destinations

Kyoto, Fushimi, Arashiyama, Nara, Himeji

📄Tour Details

Kyoto is endowed with an almost overwhelming legacy of ancient Buddhist temples, majestic palaces, and gardens of every size and description. For many, just the name of Kyoto conjures up the classic images of Japan: streets of traditional wooden houses, the click-clack of geta (wooden sandals) on the paving stones, geisha in a flourish of brightly colored silks, and a tea master deliberately warming water and making tea.

You will meet a “maiko” (geisha-in-training) face-to-face, climb to the top of a Samurai castle, participate in an authentic tea ceremony, stroll through some of the most beautiful gardens in

Japan, marvel at the world’s largest bronze Buddha statue built in the 8th century, and much, much more.

Combine this tour with the Best of Tokyo and Beyond tour for a more complete Japanese experience. Or, if you only want to spend a few days in Tokyo either before or after the tour, we can arrange this for you. Contact us for details.

Tour Highlights	✔ Meet a Maiko Session and Gion Geisha District Walking Tour ✔ Fushimi Inari Shrine ✔ Arashiyama Bamboo Garden ✔ Shojin-ryori (Buddhist Vegetarian) lunch ✔ Todai-ji (Great Buddha) ✔ Himeji Castle ✔ Nishiki-koji Market
Tour Inclusions	✔ Travel Guard Gold Policy (for American tour members only) ✔ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History
Tour Exclusions	✖ International airfare is NOT included. ✖ A printed itinerary is not included ✖ Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included

Map



Tour Destinations

Kyoto
Fushimi
Arashiyama
Nara
Himeji

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Kyoto

After clearing customs and immigrations (which will normally take about one hour but can take up to a three due to increased tourism to Japan), proceed to the MK Shuttle kiosk to check in (kiosk maps in appendix). In a shared shuttle van, you will be taken to the hotel. Check-in to the hotel. No meals are included.

1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

Day 2 Kyoto - Nijo Castle, Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion), Nishiki-koji Market, Tea Ceremony

After breakfast, we will start the day at the Nijo Castle. Built in 1603, it was the Kyoto home of Tokugawa Ieayasu, the first Tokugawa Shogun. The ostentatious style of construction was intended as a demonstration of Ieyasu's prestige, and to signal the demise of the emperor's power. The finest artists of the day filled the castle with delicate transom woodcarvings and paintings by the Kano School on sliding doors. One of the castle's most intriguing features is the so-called "nightingale" floors. To protect the Shogun from real or imagined enemies, these floorboards creak when stepped on. Next we will visit Kinkaku-ji. Kinkaku-ji, also known as the Golden Pavilion, is one of Kyoto's, as well as Japan's, most recognizable attractions. The gleaming building covered in gold leaf seems to float on the aptly named Mirror Pond, especially on a sunny day. After lunch you will have some free time at Nishiki Koji. Nishiki Koji is a narrow, five block long shopping street lined by more than one hundred shops and restaurants. Known as "Kyoto's Kitchen", this lively retail market specializes in all things food related, like fresh seafood, produce, knives and cookware, and is a great place to find seasonal foods and Kyoto specialties, such as Japanese sweets, pickles, dried seafood and sushi. Following this free time, we will participate in an authentic tea ceremony. The regimented discipline of the tea ceremony has been practiced for more than 400 years, and at one time was considered mandatory for Samurai as an aid to train the mind. After the tea ceremony, we will return to the ryokan. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 1 Hour; Walking: Heavy

Day 3 Fushimi - Fushimi Inari Shrine; Kyoto - Higashiyama District, Yasaka Shrine, Gion Geisha District

After breakfast, we are off by train to the nearby city of Fushimi, one of the largest sake producing regions of Japan. Here we will visit the Fushimi Inari shrine. This Shinto Shrine, established in the 8th century, is famous for the long tunnels of vermilion torii gates straddling a network of trails leading to the top of the heavily forested Mt. Inari. We will then travel to the Higashiyama District. This area of narrow, cobblestone alleys with its temples, shrines, numerous shops and restaurants is truly enjoyable and relaxing. We will stop for lunch in the Higashiyama District. We will then visit the Yasaka Shrine, also known as the Gion Shrine. This shrine, built over 1350 years ago, is one of the most famous shrines in Kyoto. The shrine's main hall combines the honden (inner sanctuary) and haiden (offering hall) into a single building. Next, we will walk to the famous Gion Geisha District. Here, you will see where the Geiko (in Kyoto they call themselves Geiko, not Geisha) and Maiko live and work. You may even see one on their way to one of their appointments. We will return to the hotel after some free time in the Gion District. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local Japanese restaurant are included.

Travel: 1 Hour;; Walking: Heavy

Day 4 Arashiyama - Tenryuji, Arashiyama Bamboo Forest, Shojin-ryori (Buddhist Vegetarian) lunch, Okachi Sanso, Gioji Temple

After breakfast, we travel by train to the nearby town of Arashiyama. Once a favorite relaxation spot of the Emperors, Arashiyama is located on the hillsides bordering the banks of the Katsura River northwest of Kyoto. We will first visit the bamboo gardens which Arashiyama is famous for, located just outside the north gate of Tenryu-ji. This dense bamboo forest, with its rows upon rows of long, ringed, smooth stems, provide a feeling of composure and tranquility. The sound of the wind blowing through the bamboo, the stems knocking against each other and the rustling of the leaves is revered in Japan. Next, we visit Tenryuji Temple. Tenryu-ji is part of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, and was originally built in 1339 on the former site of Emperor Go-Daigo's villa. A priest had dreamt of a dragon rising from the nearby river, hence the name which means "Heavenly Dragon". The garden represents a transition between earlier pond gardens and the karesansui (dry landscape) gardens that later became popular in Zen temples. The focus of the garden is a pond that lies at the base of the hills rising to Mount Arashi, which is incorporated into the design of the garden in the earliest known example of borrowed scenery (shakkei). At the far end of the pond are two rock groupings. These rock groupings are orientated on a vertical alignment, which was a departure from the horizontal alignments in earlier gardens. After finishing the tour of the temple and garden, we will enjoy a Shojin-ryori lunch (Buddhist vegetarian diet with no garlic or onions) at the temple. Following lunch we will visit the Okochi Sanso and Gioji Temple. Okochi Sanso is the former villa of the popular Japanese actor Okochi Denjiro. The property consists of the living quarters, several gardens and tea houses. Gioji Temple, with its thatched roof gates and moss garden is a tranquil paradise. Later in the afternoon, we will return to Kyoto by train. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch is included.

Travel: 2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 5 Himeji - Himeji Castle, Kokoen Garden

We will take a Shinkansen (bullet train) to the nearby city of Himeji. Himeji Castle, also known as White Heron Castle due to its elegant, white appearance, is widely considered Japan's most spectacular castle for its imposing size and beauty and its well preserved, complex castle grounds. The castle is both a national treasure and a world heritage site. Unlike many other Japanese castles, it was never destroyed by war, earthquake or fire and survives to this day as one of the country's twelve original castles. The castle recently underwent extensive renovation over several years and was fully re-opened to the public in March 2015. Himeji Castle lies at a strategic point along the western approach to the former capital city of Kyoto. The first fortifications built on the site were completed in the 1400s, and were gradually enlarged over the centuries by the various clans who ruled over the region. The castle complex as it survives today is over 400 years old and was completed in 1609. It comprises over eighty buildings spread across multiple baileys, which are connected by a series of gates and winding paths. After touring the castle, we will visit the nearby Kokoen Garden. Kokoen is a relatively recently constructed Japanese style garden, which was opened in 1992 on the former site of of the feudal lord's west residence (Nishi-Oyashiki). It consists of nine separate, walled gardens designed in various styles of the Edo Period. Among the gardens are the garden of the lord's residence which features a pond with a waterfall, a tea garden where visitors can enjoy green tea in a tea ceremony house, a pine tree garden, a bamboo garden and a flower garden. Late in the afternoon we will return to Kyoto by Shinkansen (bullet train). Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local restaurant is included.

Travel: 2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 6 Nara - Kasuga Shrine, Nara Deer Park, Todaiji (Great Buddha), Meet a Maiko Session

We take a train to the original capital of Japan, Nara. Nara was the capital of Japan in the 8th

century before it was moved to Kyoto. We will first visit Kasuga Shrine. This shrine was first established in the 8th century, and was completely rebuilt every 20 years according to Shinto tradition until the 19th century. There are thousands of stone lanterns lining the entrance to the shrine. We then walk through Nara Park on our way to Todai-ji. Along the way, you will run into the famous Nara deer. These deer have been here since the 7th century, and roam at their free will protected by Buddhist traditions. Todai-ji is the largest wooden building in the world, and houses the world's largest bronze statue of Buddha. In the late afternoon, we will travel back to Kyoto to the Gion Geisha district. Here, in a teahouse, we will attend a Meet a Maiko session. (A Maiko is a Geisha in training.) She will perform a short dance, answer any of your questions and pose for pictures with you. After this we will have a walking tour of the Gion Geisha district. Here you will see where the Geisha and Maiko live and work. We may even see one on their way to their appointments. After this we will enjoy our Sayonara Dinner. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch and dinner at a local Japanese restaurant included.

Travel: 2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 7 Kyoto - Free Day

Today is a free day. Breakfast at the ryokan is included.

Travel: N/A; Walking: TBD

Day 8 Sayonara

It's time to say "sayonara" (goodbye). You will be escorted to the Kyoto train station, and then take the Express train on your own to the Kansai International Airport, just outside Osaka. Breakfast at the ryokan is included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

Walking level descriptions:
Light – 0 to 2 miles on level ground
Medium – 2 to 4 miles on level ground or 0 to 2 miles on hilly ground
Heavy – 4 to 6 miles on level ground or 2 to 4 miles on hilly ground

Dates & Pricing

Dates	Price (land only) / Single Supplement (All prices are per Person)	Status

Add-On Tours

Our tours and tour itineraries are the best, but as the saying goes, “you can’t make everyone happy all of the time”. There may a specific destination or a specific experience you may want to include in your visit to Japan that may not be included your tour. Choose from our Add On tours to include your interests and make your Japan tour even better.

Click HERE **to view all of the Add-On Tours.**

Or, use the arrows to scroll though the recommended list of Add-On Tours for this tour.
















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Inclusions

- Local, licensed, English-speaking, Japanese guides
- **Travel insurance from Travel Guard**, one of the world's largest travel insurance providers, will be provided to everyone from the United States. All others will receive a $100 per person credit and will be responsible for obtaining their own travel insurance in their own home country. (The insurance provided by Samurai Tours will cover the land portion only. Insurance to cover airfare and other additional expenses is the tour member's responsibility.)
    - Exact coverage dependent on state
        - For residents of the following states please click here for your available plan. FL, KS, MN, MO, MT, NY, and WA
        - For all other states and the District of Columbia click here
    - **Travel Insurance Surcharge:** Depending on your age at the time the travel insurance is purchased, you may be subject to the following surcharge for your travel insurance. Travel insurance surcharges will be due at the same time as your tour deposits. (the surcharge itself is not insured)
        - Up to 69 – $0
        - 70-74 – $57
        - 75-79 – $109
        - 80-84 – $218
        - 85+ – $349
    - **Travel Insurance Opt-Out:** If you would prefer to opt out of the travel insurance, please note this at the time of registration. You will receive a $100 credit per person, which will be reflected on your invoice. In the event that you would need to cancel your tour, cancellation penalties may apply. See the Terms and Conditions page for the Cancellation Fees Schedule.
- Transfers to and from Osaka's Kansai Airport or Osaka's Itami Airport by shared shuttle van.
- For those requiring meeting or sending services on other than the scheduled arrival/departure dates, there will be a $100 fee for the meeting service from the airport into Kyoto or the sending service to the Kyoto train station.
- Optional meeting service at Tokyo's airports will be an extra $100 fee per group. If you are arriving or departing at Tokyo's Narita or Haneda Airports, there will be an extra $150 fee per person for the train tickets to/from Kyoto for either of these airports (the meeting service is required if you want us to purchase the train tickets to Kyoto for arrival).
- Lodging for 7 nights in a Japanese-style ryokan or western-style hotel
- Meals
    - Japanese-style or Western-style breakfast every morning.?(Please Note: Some ryokans offer Japanese breakfasts only.)
    - Five Japanese-style lunches
    - One Japanese-style dinner
- All transportation costs when traveling with the group. (Transportation costs during scheduled free times are the tour member's responsibility)
- Electronic version of itinerary
- Admission fees to the destinations and activities listed in the Tour Highlights column on the right. (Itinerary specifics subject to change.)
- Sayonara dinner at the end of the tour

Each tour member receives a tour handbook. This handbook is full of tips and suggestions taken from our Japan travel experiences that allow you to better plan and prepare for your trip, and therefore enjoy your trip even more. The tips and suggestions included cover everything from how to save while exchanging money, what to pack, some basic Japanese-language tips, general etiquette do's-and-don'ts, ryokan customs, etc.

Exclusions

- Airfare is NOT included
- Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included

- A printed itinerary is not included

Thank you for downloading this PDF version of our tour. Please visit our website at www.samuraitours.com/tours for the most current dates, prices and information.

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